

*SRT 4 (South) Focus Group Meeting Notes  
October 18, 2011  
SRT 4 Office – Harper Archer Middle School*

Strength-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats Analysis (SWOT Analysis) is a tool for investigation and decision making. SWOT analysis is used for a variety of purposes in business and by different kinds of organizations - including school districts. SWOT analysis promotes brainstorming. Rather than relying on ingrained or instinctive reactions, SWOT Analysis promotes proactive thinking. On October 18 two SRT 4 Focus Groups conducted a SWOT analysis for elementary schools, followed by a similar discussion of middle/high schools. The SWOT was conducted around the following general subject areas:

- a. Communities and schools
- b. Redistricting, consolidation, expansion
- c. Alternative grade configurations/center concepts

Discussion results are summarized below. “Identified issues” summarize findings reported by the consultant team or observations made by focus group participants which do not easily fall into the SWOT framework. Issues are followed by the SWOT results. Where points apply specifically to middle or high schools they are noted as such. Otherwise the statements either refer to elementary schools or are applicable to all grade levels. Observations marked in **red** were identified as priorities by 3 or more focus group participants.

**IDENTIFIED ISSUES:**

- Demographic trends indicate that enrollment at schools in the northern portions of SRT 4 should continue to rise over the next several years, particularly in the middle and high school grades.
- Most schools in the northern portion of SRT 4 are already over-capacity; schools in the southern portion tend to be at either a comfortable capacity or are under-enrolled;
- Single gender academies are impacting more traditional schools, particularly Douglass High School, and complicate transportation and potential redistricting options.

**STRENGTHS**

- Elementary schools have a long history and strong community ties in this part of SRT 4. In some cases the schools predate several of the neighborhoods that have developed around them. Long-term residents have strong loyalties to their

neighborhood schools. While a strength, these strong ties could also make consolidation and redistricting more threatening to those neighborhoods.

- The single-gender CSK and BEST draw 80% of their students locally and were characterized as both a strength and a

threat (to Douglass High School.)

Identified strengths included a more focused learning environment and greater parental support, particularly at the girls' middle school.

- Schools in the SRT are generally in "good" locations and are accessible to major transportation routes. Several of the schools in the SRT are located close to each other, which creates opportunities to try new approaches and consider consolidating schools.
- Some schools have been able to develop local business support and partnerships. In some parts of the SRT it is easier to raise funds than others. Area churches are major partners for some schools.

#### WEAKNESSES

- **Levels of parental/business involvement and support are not uniform and are a weakness in most schools, inhibiting the schools' ability to form active PTA's and raise outside funding.** The level of parental involvement has been trending downward over the past two years. Parental involvement also typically drops off as students move through middle and high school.
- The area in general has a lot of transitional housing. The population is very mobile and there is a high turnover rate among students in some schools. Large numbers of people have been moving out of the area due to the economy and vacancy rates are increasing.

- **There are larger social and community development issues at work which are causing under-utilization of some schools. APS could make those issues worse and cause further enrollment losses if larger "community" issues are ignored or not understood.**
- The single gender academies and primary centers complicate transportation issues. Some neighborhoods are served by multiple bus runs. Many households are sending children to more than one elementary and middle school, which makes parental involvement more difficult.
- Demolition of AHA public housing has negatively impacted enrollment at Boyd Elementary.

#### OPPORTUNITIES

- The proximity of some schools to each other creates opportunities to consolidate while still maintaining neighborhood schools.
- **Combining schools that are close to each other and concentrating resources in fewer schools could increase the student population if the changes result in more concentrated resources and better schools. Parents want to place their children in the best quality schools possible - better is far more important than bigger.**
- Utilizing possible vacated school facilities presents both an opportunity and a threat. It is very important to

identify immediate plans for re-use of consolidated buildings – preferably uses that would be perceived as resources for the surrounding neighborhoods.

- Parents are choosing educational options which offer their children access to the most resources. APS has an opportunity to create a better balance of resources among area schools.
- More redevelopment opportunities should be created as the economy improves, perhaps raising enrollment in underutilized schools.

#### THREATS

- Redistricting children into larger attendance zones and transporting them to schools further from their neighborhoods.
- Some schools are located on busy transportation routes. Traffic and access concerns need to be considered carefully. Some attendance areas should not be expanded in certain directions due to traffic and access constraints.
- Parents have options with charter schools, private schools and the single gender academies. The environment is very competitive. If changes do not improve resources for students or are perceived to result in a less equitable distribution of resources among schools, APS will lose more students.
- **Creating more vacant/underutilized buildings will be a further drag on the**

**community. Closing/mothballing buildings or making them available to more charter schools will make the situation worse.**

While also a strength, strong neighborhood ties are also a threat in terms of opposition to consolidation or redistricting proposals. While a strength, strong loyalties to neighborhood schools could make consolidation and redistricting more difficult. School consolidation and redistricting need to be approached strategically.

- The pending closure and demolition of the “Overlook Atlanta” apartment complex could impact students in both SRT 1 and 4. Closure of the complex could negatively impact Woodson Elementary. Community leaders are attempting to convince the developer to delay evictions until the end of the school year.
- The single gender high schools and charter schools have tended to attract better performing students and have negatively impacted Douglass High School and some neighborhood schools. This portion of SRT 4 needs a proactive strategy to “coexist” with charter schools and use them as a resource rather than as a drain on traditional APS schools.

